

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0914

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

INFO AMCONSUL MEDAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EGEN, ID

SUBJECT: PRESS REPORTS FAMINE LOOMING IN DROUGHT-STRICKEN
PARTS OF JAVA

SUMMARY. LOCAL PRESS STORIES AND EDITORIALS REFLECT
GROWING CONCERN THAT PROLONGED DROUGHT WILL LEAD TO
FAMINE IN ARID PORTIONS OF EAST AND CENTRAL JAVA. WHILE
DROUGHT LESS SEVERE AND GOVERNMENT BETTER PREPARED THAN
IN 1972, SITUATION HAS SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS. PRESS
EXCERPTS FOLLOW. END SUMMARY.

1. "WE ALL HOPE THERE WILL BE NO SEVERE SCARCITY OF FOOD
THIS YEAR, CAUSING UNNECESSARY DEATH AMONG OUR POOR PEOPLE,
OWING TO THE EXTRAORDINARY PROLONGATION OF THE DRY SEASON.
IN MANY AREAS IN CENTRAL JAVA, THE SOIL IS CRACKED, HAS
BECOME AS HARD AS STONE AND IS ABSOLUTELY UNTILLABLE.
FOOD IS USUALLY SCARCE IN CENTRAL JAVA AROUND DECEMBER,
BUT IF JULY AND AUGUST ARE DRY AND THE SECOND HARVEST
IS A FAILURE, THEN CENTRAL JAVA IS IN FOR A VERY LONG
PERIOD OF FOOD SHORTAGE. THIS IS SEPTEMBER AND STILL
NO RAIN HAS FALLEN. MINISTER WIDJOJO RECENTLY MADE A
TOUR OF THE DRY AREAS AND BULOG HAS ASSURED US IT HAS
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SUFFICIENT STOCKS OF RICE. THE FACTS SHOW THAT THIS

YEAR'S FOOD DEFICIT WILL BE A VERY SERIOUS ONE. ALTHOUGH WE KNOW THAT IN SOME AREAS PEOPLE HAVE RUN OUT OF FOOD, THE RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SEEMS TO BE DECIDEDLY RELUCTANT TO DISCLOSE THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION. KEEPING SUCH SERIOUS NEWS FROM THE PUBLIC MAY BE ALL RIGHT IF THIS IS THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY, BUT IN THAT CASE DOLOG MUST TAKE DIRECT REMEDIAL ACTION BY DISTRIBUTING FOOD TO THE STARVING PEOPLE. IF POSSIBLE THIS SHOULD BE FREE AS MANY OF THESE PEOPLE ARE ALSO OUT OF CASH; THEIR ONLY INCOME COMES FROM SELLING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS. IF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ARE NOT ABLE TO OVERCOME THE SHORTAGE, THEY SHOULD ADMIT THIS OPENLY AND WE ARE SURE THE GENERAL PUBLIC WILL COME TO THE RESCUE WITH FOOD AND CASH DONATIONS." (EDITORIAL, SUARA MERDEKA, SEPTEMBER 6, 1976).

2. "THE POPULATION OF PACITAN KABUPATEN, EAST JAVA, IS THREATENED WITH STARVATION IF RAINFALL IS INADEQUATE IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER. THE 1976 PRODUCTION OF CASSAVA, THEIR STAPLE FOOD, IS ESTIMATED TO BE ONLY 30 PERCENT OF THE ANNUAL AVERAGE. PRODUCTION OF PALM SUGAR, THEIR MAIN CASH CROP, DECLINED BY 25 PERCENT. IT IS FEARED THAT THE DROUGHT WILL ALSO AFFECT OTHER DEFICIT AREAS SUCH AS SOUTH PONOROGO, TRENGGALEK, LAMONGAN, BOJONEGORO AND MADURA." (MERDEKA, SEPTEMBER 11).

3. "SEVERAL AREAS IN JAVA ARE SUFFERING CRITICALLY FROM THE PROLONGED DRY SEASON, ESPECIALLY THE KABUPATEN OF SOKOHARDJO, WONOGIRI, KARANGANYAR, BOYOLALI, SRAGEN, CILACAP AND KEBUMEN IN CENTRAL JAVA. PRESIDENT SUHARTO HAS INSTRUCTED THE ECONOMIC MINISTERS TO IMPLEMENT A SIX-POINT PROGRAM TO ASSIST PEOPLE OF THE DROUGHT-STRICKEN AREAS:

- (A) FOOD DISTRIBUTION TO CRITICALLY STRICKEN AREAS
 - (B) ACCELERATION OF LABOR-INTENSIVE PROJECTS
 - (C) INCREASING NUMBER OF WAREHOUSES FOR FOOD STORAGE
 - (D) SUPPLY OF WATER TO CRITICAL AREAS FOR DRINKING AND COOKING
 - (E) PROVISION OF SEEDS FOR COMING PLANTING SEASON, FREE OF CHARGE
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(F) MORATORIUM ON REPAYMENT OF BIMAS CREDITS. MINISTER WIDJOJO STATED THAT IN ORDER TO PREVENT STARVATION AMONG PEOPLE OF THE CRITICALLY STRICKEN AREAS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS SET ASIDE 900,000 TONS OF RICE, CORN AND OTHER FOODSTUFFS. HE ADDED THAT THE DROUGHT WAS NOT AS BAD AS IN 1972." (KARYA DARMA, SEPTEMBER 3).

4. "INSTEAD OF PLANTING RICE MANY FARMERS IN CENTRAL JAVA HAVE SHIFTED TO PLANTING TOBACCO AND

CASH CROPS BECAUSE THEY ANTICIPATED A LONG DRY SEASON. IN THE DEMAK AREA FARMERS HAVE PLANTED SORGHUM WITH GOOD RESULTS. THIS HAS INVOLVED 50 PERCENT OF THE AREA USUALLY PLANTED WITH RICE. THE RISE IN THE PRICE OF RICE THESE PAST TWO WEEKS (10-15 PERCENT) SHOULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO SPECULATORS." (KOMPAS, SEPTEMBER 7).

5. "THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WILL SEND 15 WATER WAGONS TO AREAS IN CENTRAL JAVA WHICH ARE SUFFERING FROM DROUGHT AND THREE TO THE ARID AREA OF JOGYAKARTA, GUNUNGKIDUL. THE TANKERS WILL BE USED TO CARRY DRINKING AND COOKING WATER FOR THE RESIDENTS IN THESE AREAS FROM WATER-SURPLUS AREAS." (SUARA MERDEKA, SEPTEMBER 7.)

6. "GOVERNOR SOENANDAR HAS ORDERED FOOD TO BE SENT TO THE EIGHT DROUGHT-STRICKEN AREAS IN EAST JAVA. CORN WILL BE SENT TO PACITAN, PONOROGO, BOJONEGORO, TRENGGALEK, AND SEVERAL KABUPATEN IN MADURA. MANY FARMERS FROM THESE AREAS HAVE GONE TO SURABAYA TO FIND WORK AS THERE IS NO WATER FOR THEIR RICEFIELDS. THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE ANNOUNCED THAT FOOD STOCKS IN EAST JAVA ARE ADEQUATE. OF THE 8,317 VILLAGES IN THE PROVINCE ONLY 150 REPORTED FOOD SHORTAGES. EAST JAVA DOLOG HAS COLLECTED 265,000 TONS OF RICE THIS YEAR. IN ADDITION THEY HAVE A CARRY-OVER OF 60,000 TONS OF RICE AND 10,000 TONS OF CORN. EFFORTS WERE MADE TO OBTAIN TAPIOCA FROM WEST JAVA, AND SULAWESI, BUT THESE PROVINCES REPLIED THEY HAVE ONLY ENOUGH FOR THEIR OWN NEEDS." (JAWA POS, SEPTEMBER 14).

7. COMMENT: STARVATION IN ARID PARTS OF EAST AND CENTRAL JAVA IS BY NO MEANS RARE. THE LAST SEVERE DROUGHT WAS IN 1972. WEATHER CONDITIONS THEN WERE EVEN WORSE THAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEY ARE NOW, AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS UNPREPARED. AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF PERSONS DIED AND THE RESULTING RICE SHORTAGE SPARKED THE FIRST WAVE OF A NEAR-DISASTROUS INFLATION. THIS TIME THE GOVERNMENT, IN ANTICIPATION OF THE 1977 ELECTIONS, HAS BUILT UP STOCKS OF RICE REGARDED HERE AS ADEQUATE -- PROVIDED THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM WORKS AND PILFERAGE FROM GOVERNMENT WAREHOUSES IS KEPT WITHIN BOUNDS. ALSO, POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD COMPEL THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THE LID ON RICE PRICES. NEVERTHELESS, A NEAR-TOTAL FAILURE OF THE SECOND RICE CROP IN THE AFFECTED AREAS IS INCREASINGLY LIKELY, AND THE SITUATION BEARS CLOSE WATCHING. WHILE AMEMBASSY JAKARTA IS IN THE BEST POSITION TO EVALUATE AND MONITOR IT, WE WILL CONTINUE TO REPORT DEVELOPMENTS FROM HERE. BROWER

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